

# INCARCERATION AND BEYOND

## Transition from Father to "DAD"

### Teacher Notes

The purpose of this section is to solidify the participant's commitment to his learning by transitioning him ceremoniously from being a biological father to the ever- loving DAD.

The emphasis in the program has been commitment to one's family. This section is meant to be a celebration of that commitment and a rite of passage. We encourage each teacher and their administration to facilitate a gathering of the participant's family in order for them to observe and participate in this rite. The care and emotion that went into the concept behind this program will be played out and become self evident during this gathering.

Throw a party! Have a blast! Congratulations.

The Curriculum Committee

# INCARCERATION AND BEYOND

Transition from Father to "DAD"

Handout

## WRITING A LETTER HOME

The following letter is a sample of a first letter home. The letter itself is not as important as the issues it covers. Note that the author discusses those concerns that would worry a child including writing and calling information, safety, health, food, clothing, sleeping, visits, work and friends.

Children know jail through television and movies. They need a more realistic picture. Parents need to reduce the child's fear, to be honest and yet not to make jail or prison sound "too good!"

Every letter home should include three messages:

1. I love you.
2. I miss you.
3. I will be back. (Only if you will go back! Don't lie.)
4. It's not your (the child's) fault.

Letters home are most effective when they deal with everyday situations that children can relate to, such as comments about the sunshine, the trees, what happened at lunch, etc. Parents with young children can draw pictures (i.e. a happy face with the comment "This is how I feel when I think of you!"). Children also enjoy make believe stories or poems written especially for them by mom or dad.

The goal of communication is to reassure the child that his/her parent is safe and well, so the child can relax and not feel as anxious about the situations.

It is important to "walk a line" that encourages the child to not go to jail. Make lists of "negative" things about jail that do not frighten a child, but that give a clear message that this is not a good place to be.

# INCARCERATION AND BEYOND

## Transition from Father to "DAD"

Handout: Sample Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I love you and I miss you. I know you don't understand why I am not with you. You have nothing to do with my leaving you, it's not your fault. I made a mistake and I broke the law (for older children you can explain more if you want to). A judge sentenced me to jail, I will be here.

There are lots of other men here. We live together in dorms. We each have our own bed. We share a TV., one for 100 men. There is no privacy here, we all live together.

I know that you have seen lots of things on TV. about prisons and jails, but it's really not like TV. The guards don't carry guns and I am safe here.

I really miss you at mealtime too. Here we take turns eating. The whole dorm goes to eat at the same time, we line up and walk to the cafeteria. There are lots of men here so it takes a long time for everyone to eat. The food is okay, but not like we have at home. I get plenty to eat and I am not hungry.

I go to school everyday, I work hard. I get credit for working hard and I can use my credit to get out sooner.

It is hard for me to get to the phone because there are so many men and so few phones. I will call as often as I can.

I would love to see you. (Discuss arrangements)

If I get sick there is a nurse here and I will get help. There is also a doctor that comes by to check on us.

I love you and I miss you. I wish I could be with you; I know this is hard for you. I am not happy being so far from you. I really don't like it here, it isn't any fun. I don't get any time alone, there is always someone around, and it's noisy. We all go to bed very early and the TV. gets turned off by 8:00, so I miss the freedom to do what I want when I want too!!

I think of you often, I'll write again soon!! You can write me at \_\_\_\_\_ Tell me about you friends, school, and what you're doing. Besides you, the things I miss most are \_\_\_\_\_ (i.e. fast foods, privacy, freedom, driving, TV., shopping, sun, trees, etc.).

Love Dad

# INCARCERATION AND BEYOND

## Transition from Father to "DAD"

### ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENT LETTERS

1. Have the child make a map of the safest route between home and school and mail it back.
2. Ask your child to draw you a picture and send it to you.
3. Send stationary to the child and ask him/her to write a letter and color the stationary for you.
4. Send me a picture of you.
5. Write me about your favorite book or TV. show.

### OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS TO WRITE ABOUT

1. If you had \$10.00 and could buy anything, what would it be?
2. If you went on a long trip, where would you go? How would you get there?
3. If you were on an island, what food would you take, what game, what book?
4. My teacher's name is \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Today I ate lunch with my friend. Who did you have lunch with?
6. Last night we watched \_\_\_\_\_ on TV. My favorite show is \_\_\_\_\_ . What is your favorite.
7. What is your favorite color?
8. What is your favorite restaurant? What do you like to order?
9. What game do you like to play? What game do you like to watch? Is it important to win?
10. If you had to leave for a long journey and could only take 3 things what would you take? (All the people you love are going, too.)
11. In school my favorite subject was \_\_\_\_\_. What is your favorite subject.?
12. Who is the smartest kid in your class?
13. Who is the best reader in your class?

Remember: Don't make any promises you won't keep - relationships are built on trust - be honest, even if it hurts. Be sure not to scare children about the police, as the child may need help while the parent is away. The police don't put people in jail - peoples actions put them in jail.

# INCARCERATION AND BEYOND

## Transition from Father to "DAD"

### BEING A DAD

We've been talking about how to be a good father for quite awhile, let's talk a little bit about why.

With all the work that comes from being a good partner and a good family man, there's a lot of fun. No one will ever love you the way your child will, if you let him. To the child, you can be the best father and the most important man in the world. Children are work, but they are also fun. Playing with a small child for a few minutes can remind us of what it's like to be a child. To a child, the world is full of surprises. A child can spend an hour playing with a stick and a piece of string and can imagine himself flying a spaceship or driving a race car just sitting in a chair.

As we grow up, we are told not to play, not to imagine, and yet, even adults need play. Being with a child can remind you of what a wonderful place the world is. There is one warning about enjoying your children. **Remember:** You cannot expect a child to make your life happy. If you come home from work feeling bad, you cannot expect your child to make you feel better. It's a dangerous thing to do because you will be angry and disappointed if the child cries or misbehaves, as children will, instead of giving you a big hug.

Still, children are fun a lot of the time. It's very important to talk to and play with your child. It's not only fun, it helps the child learn about the world. When a child plays house, plays dolls, or pretends to be a grown-up, the child is practicing to be an adult. After all, the men and women who pilot the space shuttle were probably children who played astronaut on the living room couch. A child's dreams sometimes come true and, even if they don't, they say a lot about how the child feels about things. A child's world is full of wonder but it is also full of fear. Children are sometimes afraid of strangers, dogs, monsters who live in the closet or under the bed, and many other things. What things were you afraid of as a child?

The things that scare a child will come out in a child's play. Play can be a way of dealing with fears. If a child is afraid of monsters, he may play that he's a monster. Watching a child play, you can often tell a good deal about how that child feels. Children who do not have things and people to play with really miss out. Some parents not only do not play with the child, they also stop the child from playing. This is a bad mistake. Such children have problems in later life because their parents stopped them from learning about the world and expressing themselves.

Children make noise when they play. Parents just have to learn to live with that. While you can make sure that an older child keeps it within reason in the house, it's important for the child to have opportunities to run and make noise. A regular trip to the park is one way to do this. Children need exercise just like adults. It helps to develop their muscles and coordination and it's a way of letting off steam. A child who never has a chance to run and yell will probably have trouble with sports and other physical activities in later life.

One big mistake that fathers make is to want their kids to be star athletes and to push them into sports too early. A small child just doesn't have the physical capabilities to play sports and fathers who push their kids into serious sports take all the fun out of play. If your child learns that it's fun to exercise and play, he or she will be more likely to play sports in later life. If you try to turn your five year old into a professional basketball player, you are likely to teach him to hate basketball.

We talk a lot about not hitting your kids and about ways to control them. Let's talk for a minute about the more powerful tool parents have to get kids to do what the parents want. What do you think that tool is? It's praise and encouragement, not strict discipline. Parents are often quick to yell at a kid when he does something wrong. It's far more important to praise the kid when he does something right. If you just sit there and don't say anything, just keep watching TV., how is the kid supposed to know he's doing is what you want? Kids imitate and kids try to please.

Praise really works so much better than strict discipline. It seems like some parents only pay attention to their kid when the kid does something wrong. That's a bad mistake. Kids want attention. If the only way they can get it is by being bad they will be bad. Sure, you do have to place controls over what a kid does. You can't just let him do anything. You have to use discipline sometimes; but, you should use praise more often. Children are funny that way. If you say to them " You're a good child and you do what daddy tells you", they will. If you say, "You're bad and you never do anything right", that's what you'll get. Think about it; isn't that how it works for you? Don't you try harder when you get some credit? You can say "that's a good try, keep trying and you'll get it right. "

Which do you think works better? Remember kids are fun! Don't expect your child to help you feel better. Play with your kid and let him play. Kids need noise and exercise. Praise your kid more often than you discipline him.

**Show** your child you love him, Dad!

## HOW TO BE A GOOD PARENT

By Marian Edelman

Here are 10 ways to help your child grow up to be a successful adult:

1. Schedule an activity once a week that you can do with your children. Make it a weekly date that can't be broken. At the end of every month, take a moment to grade yourself on how good a parent you've been.
2. Expose your children to living role models - scientists, writers, engineers, religious and civic leaders, artists, government officials, sports figures, doctors and lawyers.
3. Encourage children to do errands for older or disabled people in the community to teach them a sense of responsibility and service.
4. Take every opportunity to show an interest in the problems of your children's friends. Insist on knowing who their friends are, their parents' names, addresses, and telephone numbers.
5. Protect your children. Make arrangements for supervised activity for the times you cannot be with them. Check out what's available in your community, such as church programs, after-school programs, local YWCAs and YMCAs Girls and Boys or Police Girls and Boys Clubs, and other community-based organizations.
6. Maintain close contact with your children's school. Make an effort to know the teacher, administrators, teacher's aides, and others in the schools.
7. Establish a time and quiet place for your children to do homework everyday. Instill in them a sense of our rich cultural heritage making sure they have book in the home and at school that positively depict our history.
8. Be an advocate for the needs of your child in the school system, recreational department and neighborhood.
9. Show love for your children. Hug them and tell them you love them. Don't take for granted that they know you care. Instill in them the discipline and responsibilities necessary to live in the family unit and in the larger community. Praise them when they do well and tell them you love them.
10. Volunteer in your child's school (for example, by tutoring students, assisting with class trips, teaching mini courses, taking lunchroom duty, or helping develop special programs or meetings). And, if you can, help one child whose parents are unable to do these things.

*MARIAN EDELMAN is the president of the Children's Defense Fund.*